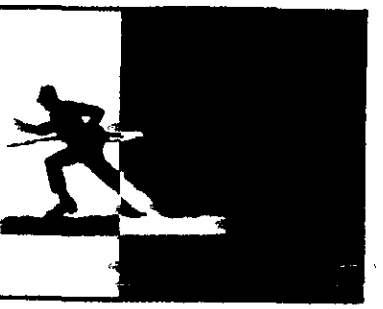
TRAINING NOTES



JRTC
The OPFOR's Training

CAPTAIN STANLEY WILSON

When units train at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, the following scene is not uncommon:

An infantry platoon is conducting a search and attack operation. As darkness falls and the vegetation becomes thicker, the platoon begins to bunch up and the lead squad becomes complacent. Suddenly shots ring out and the MILES (Multiple Integrated Lasar Engagement System) buzzers sound on two soldiers. The soldiers in the lead squad go to ground but are unsure where their attackers are.

As the platoon leader comes forward, two more men are wounded and the lead squad still cannot pinpoint the enemy. The platoon leader sends the second squad sweeping to the right, while the third maneuvers to the left. The platoon sergeant moves to help the lead squad care for its wounded and begin the evacuation process.

The second squad has moved only a short distance when it walks into a close ambush and four of its nine soldiers fall wounded. The platoon leader reacts by moving his third squad over to assist, but by the time it arrives the enemy has faded away.

The platoon settles down to evacuate its wounded and dead, but just as the ambulance arrives, so do the first volleys of 82mm mortar fire. The platoon, with its soldiers clustered around their wounded and carrying the bodies to the ambulance, sustains five more casualties.

A platoon that only minutes earlier had been a trained combat force has been reduced to less than two effective squads. Worse, it has inflicted no casualties on the opposing force (OPFOR).

UPPER HAND

By contrast, the OPFOR at the JRTC—portrayed by soldiers assigned to the 1st Battalion (Airborne), 509th Infantry—rarely find themselves in such situations. Usually, in fact, they quickly gain the upper hand and inflict far more casualties than they sustain.

As a company commander in the OPFOR battalion, I would like to share a look at the training the OPFOR receives. This may help units that are preparing for training at the JRTC as well as other units that would like to refine their own sustainment training programs.

There are no "secrets" to the OPFOR battalion's success, just simple attention to the fundamentals. The keys to effective squads and battlefield success are marksmanship, well-rehearsed battle drills, and small unit leadership.

We begin a soldier's training with marksmanship. Every soldier must understand his weapon, its capabilities, and its limitations. Once he is issued a weapon, we make sure he can hit his target.

The first step is to have each soldier zero his weapon's MILES device. This involves placing the MILES transmitter on the weapon and then twisting it so it fits tightly against the front sight post. Next, the soldier assumes a good prone supported position at the end of the 25-meter rope provided with the small arms alignment fixture (SAAF). After getting a good sight picture, the soldier fires. His team or squad leader then notes how far off zero the SAAF indicates and makes the necessary adjustments. This process continues until the soldier zeros his weapon, consistently getting 0's and 1's or 2's as indicated by the SAAF.

Once the soldier has a good zero, he will be able to maintain it. If he bumps or jars the transmitter and disrupts the zero, all he has to do to regain it is to twist the transmitter so it rests against the right edge of the front sight post. (This also means the soldier can remove the transmitter to perform the necessary maintenance on his weapon.)

The soldier then moves on to field firing. His targets, other soldiers in MILES gear, arrange themselves at known distances from 50 to 400 meters (longer for machinegun fire). The soldier, under the direction of his team leader, engages the targets, and if he cannot get "kills" he is sent back to re-zero. He continues to fire on targets at various distances until he and his team leader are satisfied that he can engage them successfully within his weapon's range. The soldier then engages moving targets under the direction of his team leader, and again continues until both are satisfied with his abilities.

Even after a soldier has mastered the basics, his marksmanship training continues with acquiring targets, hitting targets at night, and other essential skills.

Marksmanship skills are of little use, though, if a soldier cannot find targets and engage them effectively during both daylight and periods of limited visibility.

Finding a target is a basic part of marksmanship. OPFOR soldiers practice patience and stealth to acquire targets. They often find that their opponents are either lazy or complacent, using trails, crossing open areas, or exposing themselves in other ways. OPFOR soldiers are therefore trained to pay attention to these areas, which are often located along *natural lines of drift.*

(Once a soldier identifies a target, he fires single controlled shots. Here, marksmanship training really pays off, because it usually takes only one or two shots to eliminate a target.)

OBSERVING

Observing a sector is boring and, unless a soldier does it systematically, he tends to become lazy and watch only the areas that particularly interest him—along roads, busy intersections, or other easily traveled routes. Although most targets will use such routes, a soldier cannot neglect the other parts of his sector.

To ensure complete surveillance of a sector, an OPFOR soldier is taught to divide it into small portions and scan for targets from left to right, top to bottom, or near to far. The method he uses is not important so long as he takes a systematic approach that includes the entire sector.

The process of finding and engaging targets is hindered by the hours of limited visibility—that time from sunset to after dawn and during foggy or rainy and dark days—and nighttime.

It is especially difficult at night to align a weapon's sights, determine range, and identify the target. A soldier almost always fires high when engaging targets at night. To locate a target, he tends to hold his eyes wide open to allow all available light in. But when he holds his rifle up and tries to sight through the rear aperture, this causes him to change his focus and lose the fleeting target he may have had. To compensate for this, he tends to look over the top of the rear sight, align the barrel with the target, and shoot. A side view of this action would show the rounds passing well over the top of the target.

We have found that the soldier is usually not aware of this phenomenon. He believes he is shooting at night exactly as he does in the daytime, and we have to convince him otherwise. One way we use to do this is to have him observe a night ambush with night vision goggles. The lasers emitted by the MILES transmitter are visible with the goggles, and the soldier can see how high and generally off target his peers are shooting.

Once we have convinced him that the problem exists, we can train him to compensate for it by keeping both eyes open and intentionally aiming low. NCOs with night vision devices can also direct the soldiers' fires onto targets to increase enemy casualty levels. As in most other training, *the more often a soldier* practices this, the more proficient he will become.

Determining range and identifying targets are also difficult at night. For one thing, sound travels farther at night, and sound is important in determining an enemy's range at night.

An OPFOR soldier is taught to do everything possible to avoid making noise and to use the noise his opponents make to determine their direction and distance. Clouds, rain, fog, and other climatic changes—along with the season, temperature, and time of night—all affect what type of sound will travel and how far. The only way a soldier can improve his ability to judge range by sound is to practice it repeatedly under various conditions.

Identifying a target as friend or foe at night is another difficult task. Our soldiers are trained to look for tell-tale indicators. For instance, a crouching soldier can silhouette another soldier against the night sky and identify him as friend or foe by his headgear or differences in uniform and equipment.

BATTLE DRILLS

In addition, battle drills—actions that are rehearsed in advance to improve chances of survival during contact—allow OPFOR leaders to know where their men are and enable them to engage targets effectively on the battlefield.

Battle drills are essentially standing operating procedures (SOPs) based on individual and team actions, for use when contact—chance or otherwise—with an enemy has been made. They are well rehearsed, situation-dependent reactions to enemy actions.

Battle drills, like marksmanship, begin with the basics. A soldier must first know how to move as an individual before he can begin to act as a member of a team. He must know how to observe during movement, see what is around him, and make constantly changing decisions on what he will do next if something occurs. He must know where he is going and where to find the nearest cover and concealment. He must avoid stepping on vegetation that makes excessive noise. He must constantly observe his designated sector of the unit's perimeter while maintaining his place during movement and at halts.

He must also practice moving under fire. Low crawling is the safest movement technique, but it is slow and tiring. There are faster types of crawling, but they create a higher profile and increase risk. The rush is still another way of approaching a nearby enemy.

Regardless of the technique he uses, a soldier must eventually operate as a member of the team. He must then plan

all of his moves and make sure that his actions are what the team leader wants and that they tie into the overall scheme of movement for the element in contact. Otherwise, he will jeopardize the entire element. An unplanned or unwanted movement by one soldier can result in masked fires, unnecessary casualties, and even fratricides.

The individual soldier must be familiar with the variety of methods leaders use to control their elements — hand and arm signals, whistles, and voice commands — and with what each means and the desired action.

To be a full-fledged team member, a soldier must also know how to use a radio, how to call for and adjust fire, and how to send an accurate report. Although these are all standard SQT (skill qualification test) training for soldiers, few ever get a chance to put that training into action. The OPFOR soldiers practice these skills until they are comfortable performing them.

The team rehearses all types of movement, from the basic wedge through bounding overwatch, until both the individual and the group move with confidence. This teamwork culminates in battle drills.

Actions taken as a result of chance contact, hasty attack, and breaking contact are battle drills that involve fire and movement. Each requires the same skills with only a few variations — determining the enemy's location, making a hasty assessment of the situation, establishing a base of fire, and conducting fire and movement. Repetitive contact trains OPFOR leaders and soldiers to locate the enemy rapidly and make a hasty assessment of the situation.

The most difficult situation to train for is chance contact. Because neither side expects contact, the unit that gains the initiative will be victorious. OPFOR soldiers are trained to rapidly determine the size and location of the main enemy force and respond accordingly.

Controlled fire and movement or maneuver, coupled with indirect fire support, causes the opponent to hesitate long enough for the OPFOR to gain the upper hand and control the contact. If the enemy is near, as in an ambush, the

OPFOR assaults through the enemy lines, establishes a base of fire, and then makes a second assessment of the situation. Against an enemy element that is poorly deployed or that does not have a large numerical advantage, the OPFOR will attack it using fire and maneuver, close with, and then destroy it.

If the enemy is too strong, the OPFOR will begin to break contact by leaving a small detachment in contact while most of the force moves to another location. The larger force then covers the withdrawal of the detachment in contact with direct and indirect fires.

The OPFOR soldiers know, however, that no plan survives contact. What is important is for everyone to understand the intent of an order and its implementation. When they do, they will make whatever changes may be required at their level to ensure mission accomplishment.

Along with individual movement and applicable battle drills, competent OPFOR junior leaders are also essential to accomplishing missions. When these leaders understand the situation, feel free to act as the situation dictates, have the trust of both their subordinates and superiors, and know they have the fullest backing for their decisions, they will invariably complete their assigned tasks.

The OPFOR operates in a decentralized fashion. Squad leaders may not see their team leaders for many hours, and platoon leaders may see their squad leaders only once every three or four days. Because a leader in the field is closest to the battle, he must have an opportunity to make the decision on the ground. As he gains experience and becomes a more seasoned leader, he will make even better and faster decisions.

For this decentralization to work, leaders at all levels must be trusted. OPFOR leaders are trained to act on the situation and keep the chain of command informed as they do so.

Occasionally, junior leaders do make mistakes; that is the purpose of training — to allow them to make mistakes without costing lives. They must understand that their superiors realize they do not operate in a perfect world and everyone makes mistakes.

Any success a unit gains by training at

the JRTC will not be based on its knowing certain secrets or conducting unusual training. The success will come from mastering the basics. The soldiers must be confident in their weapons and capable of hitting targets with them under all conditions. And when a unit makes contact, the soldiers must know what to do as members of a team. Their leaders must also be confident and competent, trusted by their subordinates and superiors, and they must know the intent of the chain of command.

When a unit brings these principles together and is willing to take the battle to the enemy, it will succeed — at the Joint Readiness Training Center and on the battlefield.

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Leadership and PT

LIEUTENANT COLONEL HARRY D. STUMPF

Raising the level of esprit de corps in a group is an important leadership objective. Whether we call it morale, camaraderie, or team spirit, good units have it.

Small unit cohesion increases unit readiness and effectiveness in combat. Various studies have shown, in fact, that a soldier on the battlefield keeps fighting primarily because of his buddies, his squad, and his small unit leader. Cohesion, in fact, is the basis of the Army's Regimental System for units up to battalion size.

Countless techniques have been used to achieve cohesion. One that I have seen work consistently is a good, simple physical training, or PT, program. (I know that Field Manual 21-20, Physical Fitness Training, doesn't use the term PT any more, but it still fits the kind of activity I am talking about.) PT is important in its own right, of course, but many units, by paying attention to the way they conduct it, can also use it to significantly strengthen unit cohesion.

None of the aspects of the unit physical training in this technique are new. In fact, disciples of FM 21-20 would call them "traditional" or "conservative." Together, though, they form a perspective that strongly supports unit bonding.

Both personal conditioning and traditional physical training are important to combat readiness, and both should be part of a unit's emphasis. But each has its place, and today we seem to be leaning too far in the direction of personal conditioning at the expense of PT.

Personal conditioning is a life style that includes a balanced diet, proper rest, weight training, and lifetime sports (bowling, golf, tennis, swimming, sailing, and cycling). It also includes a knowledge of cardiovascular exercises and a conscious support of healthy habits. Medical and dental care are part of it, too, as are drug, tobacco, and alcohol awareness and sex education. It requires study because learning it does not come naturally.

A UNIT ACTIVITY

On the other hand, physical training, as the term is used here, is a unit activity—soldiers exercising and running together in uniform, in formation, and to a cadence. This is where leadership works to build small unit cohesion, and many units can increase the worth of the time it spends doing PT by improving its cohesion at the same time.

Why is a unit's PT session so important to cohesion? Because this is the one time in a day when a company can expect to have most of its soldiers doing something together as a unit.

In the field, the platoons separate during maneuvers. In combat units, companies and platoons are often cross-attached to different battalions and companies. Firing batteries usually have their sections in separate firing positions. During gunnery training, the company often breaks up between different firing ranges, guard details, and the rear detachment. Service units, usually separate companies, can spread to the four winds. And in garrison, because of a multitude of daily activities ranging from appointments and details to ceremonies and mandatory classes, a company rarely has everyone together engaged in a common task.

The traditional unit PT consists of calisthenics followed by a run in formation, usually in the early morning, led by the noncommissioned officers with the officers in the rear rank. Lately, though, I have noticed some disturbing variations to this type of PT. Company physical fitness sessions seem to have moved away from the regimented (disciplined) aspects of PT and toward individual workouts based on guidance from